

Turned the world upside down

- Little did we know the immensity of what had happened as we gathered to worship last Sunday morning and included prayer for the people affected by the quake & tsunami...
 - but for millions of people, their world was turned upside down
 - 125,000... more... people dead
 - millions homeless
 - particularly through the holiday makers on the beaches of Thailand and elsewhere, people across the world directly affected
 - a world was turned upside down...
- Just over 3 years ago the catastrophic final moments of 4 hijacked planes on [September 11th](#) turned the world upside down
 - thousands lost their lives;
 - I can still remember exactly where I was as the news started to break; maybe you can too
- As we this week saw the wave sweeping people off the beaches of south east Asia, as 3 years ago we were forced to listen in on the phone calls made from stricken planes to loved ones, we were all caused to ask ourselves:
 - [what really matters to me?](#)
 - [where am I going in life?](#)
- We were invited by those events ([and the by the beginning of new year](#)) to [take a new perspective on life](#)
- The world in which we live can be utterly bewildering:
 - but [we look to the Scriptures for a sense of perspective on a world that sometimes appears to be dissolving into chaos](#)

Revelation

- The Book of Revelation consists of John's vision of [God's perspective on the future](#)
 - partly in the form of [prophecy](#), partly in the form of "[apocalypse](#)", a revelation of God's purpose in history employing rather strange and stylised imagery
 - [apocalyptic](#) writing employs an almost [cartoon](#) like style to get over its message, using symbolic figures and beasts to make its points;
- But John's writing is not just apocalyptic, it is also prophetic:
 - "[[The prophet](#)] [does not only say what God purposes to do, he also proclaims what God wills to be done by men...](#) The prophet exhorts the indolent and weary, [as he consoles those who are tempted and strengthens their courage.](#)"
- So John is not merely revealing God's purpose in history ([apocalyptic](#)), but also bringing that purpose home to the lives of individual Christians ([prophet](#)).
- Indeed, John's apocalyptic prophecy is almost a letter too - written to and with the particular situation of Christians in Asia Minor in mind:
 - [clouds of persecution gathering over Asia Minor; uncertainty ahead!](#)
 - [sound familiar?](#)
- Chapter 22 brings to focus and conclusion the broad thrust of the whole book - illuminates the basic perspective that the prophecy or revelation as a whole expounds.
- Two things come to the fore, both of which point back to the message of Revelation on the broadest canvas, the things John wanted to instill in his readers thinking and outlook:
 - [there is hope](#) - Jesus is coming back again, to rule, to reign, to bring justice, joy, and to take his own home to be with him;
 - second, Jesus' return is not just good news, the ground of hope, but [serves also](#)

as a stark warning to those who do not know Him as Lord and Saviour.

- Hope and warning, warning and hope - this is what John has to say to round off his letter, his prophecy, his apocalypse.

Warnings

- Start with the warnings:

Worship God only! (vs.8, 9)

- Don't even worship the angels - God's special messengers, who are holy and pure and able to be in His presence.
 - was a danger amongst early Christians - eg. Col.2:18.
- Maybe we say - OK, no problem, I don't feel particularly tempted to worship angels - this doesn't seem to apply to me...
- But notice who it is that is tempted - John himself, who has just had revealed to him visions of God's greatness and purposes that none of us has even come near.
 - he's no immature, poorly taught young Christian!
- The danger stands for all of us to slip into the temptation of worshipping something/someone other than God - success? (in Church...), people? (famous speakers, favourite authors)...
- At that point of particular blessing, watch out - guard against the temptation of being subtly diverted from worshipping God alone by something that looks OK.

Do not seal prophecy up (v.10, 11)

- Do not seal up the perspective that Scripture brings (this Scripture, the book of Revelation, and by extension all Scripture) - do not hide it away.
- Make sure it is known and followed in the church - read it, study it, listen to it preached, proclaim it!
- **Why?**
- Because the time is near - the time when the chance for decision will be over, the chance to repent and turn to Christ, the chance to give another aspect of our lives over to him in full and glad surrender.
 - that's what v.11 is all about - don't hide Scripture's light now, for soon it will be too late!

Don't be left outside (v.14, 15)

- Previous warning applied to church - our responsibility to not seal up the gospel message and the perspective it brings on history and eternity.
- This next warning applies to those on the outside - its a warning against being left on the outside, outside the new Jerusalem, to Holy City where God is and where life is, of not having the right to eat the fruit of the tree of life - all pictures of heaven that John has been using earlier in the book.
- Anyone who remains a rebel against God - who remains in their sin (seven sins in vs.15, probably symbolic of the whole range of possible sins) - such a person will be excluded from eternal life. Such a person is one who has not accepted Jesus' offer of forgiveness and salvation.... even if they attend worship regularly, even if they are a pillar of the Kirk.
- So, don't be left on the outside!

Don't alter God's word (v.18, 19)

- Final warning: don't pervert God's truth!
- Don't muck around with it:
 - other faiths;
 - cults - pseudo-Christian, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, ...;
 - those in the church who say that there is a different way, who re-interpret God's word to make it say something more comfortable - for instance that all will be saved, regardless; (Life and Work!)
 - most insidious of all is the warning here against living in such a way as to modify Scripture's testimony - of being entirely orthodox in belief, but living a different way
 - for instance, taking away the requirement to live holy lives in response to God's

- gracious goodness - and lying, stealing, sleeping with someone outside of marriage... A lifestyle which takes away from the gospel's call to purity!
- or, for instance, being entirely orthodox in belief but **having no love**, no compassion, no ability to act with **grace** (I'm very often saddened when I hear outsiders, eg in radio discussions, talk about evangelical Christians - they know us as law-keepers, not grace-livers!)
- Dangerous thing to do! Dreadful prospect of, having rejected God's truth, being rejected by Him!

Hopes

- If there are dreadful warnings here, there is are also tremendous hopes:

Scripture is Trustworthy (v.6)

- Complement of earlier warnings - our hope is certain, for these words are true.
- We can rely on God and on His word, on his promises of gracious goodness towards us!

Blessing on Obedience (v.7)

- Simple blessing - blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book!
- Again, complement of the warning against not just wrong belief, but disobedient living.
- **Rich blessings of God's favour, care and protection.**
- A perspective the persecuted Christians John wrote too sorely needed.
- A perspective we need too - when so little of the society we live in pays any heed to God's ways, it is good to be reminded that "blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book!"

Jesus is bringing his reward (v.12, 14)

- I suppose this is a cashing out of the previous blessing - one large dimension of God's blessing is the reward he has in store for each one of us.
- **To those who have washed their robes** - in other words, become clean from their sin through the cleansing that Jesus offers - **there is the right to the tree of life and entry into the city** - the best pictures John can find for the new life there will be with God in eternity:
 - rich, juicy, succulent fruit, bursting with life and goodness;
 - a safe, secure, beautiful, Son-lit city, a gorgeous home.

"I am coming soon!"

- But arching over all the blessings, underlying all the hopes expressed here, standing behind all the warnings, is the central fact of Jesus' return.
- Three times in these few verses Jesus himself says:
 - "I am coming soon!"**
- This is the heart of the John's revelation, this is the nub of the issue - Jesus himself is coming back.
- All our living and dying, our successes and failures, all our words and deeds - they are not mere drops in the ocean of history, without meaning or purpose.
- **No - the Lord Jesus, the one who loves you and me, who died for each one - this same Lord is coming back to vindicate those who are his own and to bring them into his own nearer presence.**
- This is the reality of the situation.
- Perhaps it often becomes obscured by our daily living, by mind-numbing routines, by hard work, by our struggles... and by our joys too.
- Malcolm Muggeridge once said: **"The ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have come to realise, is to feel ourselves to be at home here on earth."**
- **"Real"** reality lies in the one who made the Universe, the one who will one day wrap-up that Universe and burst back in.
- **"I am coming soon!"**

- **Soon?** 2000 years is a long time to call "soon"!
- Sense has less to do with chronology and **more to do with how close our lives are to eternity** - for each and every one of us, eternity is closer than often we care to remember.
- We are frail flesh; we die - sometimes suddenly and without warning; **life is fragile**.
 - we are constantly on the edge of eternity, always on the point of being with Jesus.
- Jesus may come back chronologically tonight, or in another thousand years - but we need to live our lives the way they really are, **balanced on the edge of eternity**, with the closeness of his coming, the imminence of our being with him at the forefront of our thinking.
- We need to take on heaven's values:
 - those values which say the most important thing of all is a person's relationship with their Heavenly Father;
 - that we can spend ourselves on serving God because we don't need to worry about our future here - Jesus has our reward;
- Eugene Peterson puts it like this: **"Apocalypse is arson - it secretly sets a fire in the imagination that boils the fat out of an obese culture-religion and renders a clear gospel love, a pure gospel hope, a purged gospel faith"**
 - in other words, living apocalyptically, looking for Christ's return, ready for him coming back, living in the light of eternity, gets rid of all the dross and fat that we allow to build up round our lives - and leaves us free to live lives of gospel love, hope, faith.
- That's the perspective John means us to have:
 - as we live in a world devastated by natural disaster;
 - as we live still in the shadow of September 11th, in a world marred by human evil;
 - as we struggle to give meaning to the hum-drum of daily life;

Jesus is coming soon!

- Heed the warning implicit in his return;
- Rejoice in the blessings he has in store for his own;
- **But most of all, live in the light of eternity - labouring at that which God has called you to, ready always to serve him, follow him!**
- **Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!**